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The role and meaning of spirituality among older adults in Western Australia

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Sue Grossman

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my beloved younger sister, Cindi Grossman. Rest in peace.

Running head: SPIRITUALITY IN OLDER ADULTHOOD

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The Role and Meaning of Spirituality Among Older Adults in Western Australia

Sue Grossman

A Report Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of
Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) Honours, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science,

Edith Cowan University

Submitted October, 2007

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Table of Contents

	Page
Use of Thesis.....	i
Copyright and Access Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Dedication	iv
Main Title Page.....	v
Table of Contents	vi
Literature Review Title Page	1
Abstract.....	2
Literature Review.....	3
Spirituality and Religion	4
Theories of Spiritual Development.....	6
Spirituality and Psychosocial Wellbeing	9
Spirituality and Health	12
Spirituality and End of Life Issues.....	15
Meaning.....	15
Value	16
Relationships.....	16
Spirituality and Culture.....	17
Spirituality and Psychological Practice.....	19
Summary	21
Conclusion	22
References.....	23

Guidelines for Contributions by Authors	30
Research Project Title Page	34
Abstract	35
Research Project.....	36
Spiritual Development	37
Spirituality and Psychosocial Wellbeing	38
Spirituality and Physical Health	39
Spirituality and Death	39
Spirituality and Culture	40
Present Study.....	41
Method	41
Research Design.....	41
Participants.....	42
Ethics.....	43
Data Collection Procedures	43
Rigour.....	44
Data Analysis	46
Findings and Interpretations.....	46
Table 1. Themes and Subthemes.....	47
Theme 1. Connection with a Transcendent Force.....	48
Conversion	48
Relationship with a Transcendent Force.....	50
Awareness of the Presence of a Transcendent Force	51

Prayer as a Primary Spiritual Practice.....	52
Theme 2. Spirituality Provides Meaning	53
Spiritually Driven Life	53
Spirituality Provides Significance Beyond Normal Consumer Society.....	54
Connection with Others.....	55
Theme 3. Fruition of Spirituality	57
Spirituality is a Source of Resilience	58
Spirituality is Transformative	59
Spirituality is Learned.....	59
Discussion	60
Connection with a Transcendent Force.....	61
Spirituality Provides Meaning.....	63
Fruition of Spirituality	65
Researcher Reflexivity	66
Conclusion	66
References	69
Appendix A	74
Appendix B	75
Appendix C	76
Appendix D	77
Guidelines for Contribution by Authors	79

Running head: SPIRITUALITY IN OLDER ADULTHOOD

A Review of the Literature Pertaining to Spirituality in Older Adulthood

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Submitted August, 2007

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Abstract

Given the large projected increase in the proportion of Australian older adults (13% in 2004 to 22% in 2031) and the personal importance placed on spirituality in the lives of older adults, it is timely to investigate the role of spirituality in the everyday lives of older adults. The present paper analyses the literature pertaining to the psychological implications of spirituality in older adulthood. The points of discussion identified in the review include the relationship between spirituality and religion, theories of spiritual development, psychosocial wellbeing, health, end of life issues, culture, and psychological practice. It is concluded that the paucity of Australian research into spirituality in older adulthood results in a gap in the body of knowledge. Addressing this gap would be beneficial as it could inform policy makers, inform psychological and educational practice, and potentially bridge intergenerational tensions.

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Submitted: August 2007

A Review of the Literature Pertaining to Spirituality in Older Adulthood

Australia's age structure is shifting and this creates new social opportunities as well as challenges. The number of Australians in the 65 and over category is projected to increase from 2.6 million in 2004 to 5.8 million in 2031, which equates to 13% and 22% of the total population respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). This current paper focuses on spirituality, which is an important aspect for the psychological lives of many older adults (Fernandez-Ballesteros, 2005; Kirby, Coleman, & Daley, 2004). Whilst ageing can involve losses and limitations due to physical, employment, health, and social changes, spirituality is one life area that is often enhanced with advancing age and strengthens older adults' quality of life and resilience (Hamarat, Thompson, Steele, Matheny, & Simons, 2002; Wink & Dillon, 2003). Armstrong and Crowther's (2002) definition of spirituality captures its role and importance as "a relationship with a transcendent force that brings meaning and purpose to one's existence, and affects the way in which one operates in the world" (p. 4). In a time when Australian society has increased affluence, but less reverence for its aged population and increased disconnection among community members (Atchley, 1997), focussing on spirituality among Australian older adults is paramount.

This paper examines the literature pertaining to the psychological implications of spirituality in older adulthood. Whilst the majority of research carried out has been in the U.S., some work has been conducted in Canada and Britain. There is a distinct lack of research in the area of spirituality in older adulthood within an Australian context and no articles were found for this review. Whilst there are some writers on spirituality in Australia whose publications are primarily books, their focus is in

different areas, which are beyond the scope of this review. For example, Elizabeth MacKinlay (2006) has focused on spirituality and dementia from a pastoral perspective and David Tacey (2004) focused on youth spirituality. The current paper concentrates on published refereed articles with a focus on older adulthood. It will be shown that spirituality is significant to older adults' health and wellbeing and that addressing this gap in Australian research is timely and important. Six areas of scientific study were identified from a review of the literature: theories of spiritual development, spirituality and psychosocial wellbeing, spirituality and health, spirituality and end of life issues, spirituality and culture, and spirituality and psychological practice. These will be discussed in turn following an examination of the relationship between spirituality and religion. This primary examination is important because the literature attempts to differentiate these constructs with separate operational definitions.

Spirituality and Religion

Spirituality and religion are primarily delineated within the literature as different but overlapping constructs. Crowther, Parker, Achenbaum, Larimore, and Koenig (2002) generalise religion as collectivistic in nature, observable, institutionalised, and outwardly orientated. Spirituality is generalised in the opposite trend, that is, individualistic in nature, subjective, intrinsic, and inwardly oriented. Russell and Yarhouse (2006) claim, however, that separating spirituality and religion is problematic because spirituality also unfolds in a social context and religion also focuses on the individual's beliefs. Furthermore, separating these constructs may lead to spirituality being perceived as good and religion as bad and this separation

would be misleading as it dismisses the beneficial and harmful aspects of both spirituality and religion (Russell & Yarhouse, 2006).

To shed light on this technical dilemma of definitions, Marler and Hadaway (2002) conducted face-to-face interviews with 49 participants to understand how people define spirituality and religion and whether they identify themselves as spiritual or religious. The majority (68%) believed that being spiritual and being religious were different but interdependent concepts. Fewer interviewees (28%) believed that being spiritual and being religious were the same and only a minority (8%) believed that being spiritual and being religious were different and independent concepts. The researchers found that one third of the participants were unable to speak of spirituality without speaking of religion. Similarly, Marler and Hadaway found that in five studies between 1995 and 2001 ($N = 3396$), most participants (65%) identified themselves as being both spiritual and religious, some (18%) identified as being spiritual only, less still (9%) identified as being religious only, and the rest (8%) did not identify with either being spiritual or being religious. The literature tended to view spirituality as a broader concept which encompassed religion, but acknowledged that people may be spiritual without being religious (Atchley, 1997; Crowther et al., 2002; Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Russell & Yarhouse, 2006; Wink & Dillon, 2002). Marler and Hadaway also found that over the six years between 1995 and 2001 participants increasingly identified with being spiritual or with being neither religious nor spiritual. These results suggested that spirituality increased over time, but they should be interpreted cautiously because the data were from cross-sectional studies and over a relatively short time span. There is other longitudinal evidence, however, suggesting that spirituality does

increase with age (Wink & Dillon, 2002). Wink and Dillon found that the prevalence and significance of spirituality increased with advancing age in their study on religiousness, spirituality, and psychosocial function in late adulthood (Wink & Dillon, 2002). Thus, spirituality and religion are distinguishable constructs and evidence suggests that the former is enhanced with advancing age. The following section explores how spirituality develops across the lifespan.

Theories of Spiritual Development

Spirituality changes across the lifespan (Hage, 2006; Wink & Dillon, 2002). Atchley (1997) integrated three models of spiritual development into one, called the Feedback Systems Theory of Spiritual Development. This inclusive model comprises three processes which help explain spiritual development: extrinsic, intrinsic, and feedback and validation.

“Extrinsic sociocultural” (Atchley, 1997, p. 126) processes are related to changing life conditions typically associated with ageing that facilitate spiritual development and are linked to having more free time. Changing life conditions such as retirement, empty nesting, and secure income lead to more time and less pressure, providing opportunities to reflect on spiritual issues such as the meaning of life, death, and purpose (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002). Disillusionment with the external world – reduced physical prowess, diminished earning power, and loss of social status with retirement – may motivate an older adult to seek an alternative source of power, an inner power which may be found in spirituality. Indeed, this is true also of women (Gatz & Fiske, 2003) and African Americans (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002) who reported higher levels of spirituality, perhaps seeking an inner power source since they have limited access to patriarchal and socially

discriminating power structures, respectively (Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos, & Kirkby, 2003).

The second process of spiritual development is “intrinsic” (Atchley, 1997, p. 126). Intrinsic needs of spiritual deepening and inner liberation may arise with perceived disadvantages of ageing, such as, loss of power and status (Atchley, 1997). Moreover, the recognition that one has lived more years than one has yet to live may stimulate a search for spirituality (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002). Spirituality was found to provide meaning and purpose beyond everyday living, which is important in older adulthood as personal and social structures of power decay.

The third process is “feedback and validation” received from one’s spiritual community (Atchley, 1997, p. 126). Direct experience of the transcendent is a mystical experience, which is interpreted and validated within the social networks that comprise one’s spiritual community. These interpretations and validations are achieved through speaking with others, reading books, or via information from the media (Atchley, 1997). Receiving feedback for one’s spiritual experiences from like minded others validates one’s reality (Atchley, 1997). Being validated and having one’s experiences affirmed is a process which promotes spiritual development (Atchley, 1997).

Spiritual development may be evidenced in increased prayer, self-acceptance, and selfless action (Atchley, 1997). Spiritual development has often been conceptualised in mythology as a quest or journey (Greene & Sharman-Burke, 1999) on which a lone individual embarks and, having faced difficulties, triumphantly returns with the benefit of spiritual growth (Campbell, 1972). Ray and McFadden

(2001) suggested an alternative metaphor of spiritual development, namely the web (i.e., spider's web or the World Wide Web). The web metaphor supports Atchley's (1997) argument of the community being a part of the individual's spiritual developmental processes and Russell and Yarhouse (2006) also recognise that spirituality unfolds within a relational context. The web metaphor represents the complexity of spirituality, pointing to spiritual development through connections and relationships as opposed to separation and individuation, to the variability of the form that spirituality takes, and to the interconnectedness (oneness) of all life (Ray & McFadden, 2001). The web metaphor is supported by qualitative research conducted with HIV/AIDS participants who referred to a personal and cultural web as having spiritual importance (Jacobson, Luckhaupt, Delaney, & Tsevat, 2006).

Spirituality permeates all aspects of everyday life, not just at specific times, places, or events. Spirituality tends to be a filter through which all of life passes. Hill and Pargament (2003) described this filter as spirituality providing a philosophy of life. Spirituality provides transcendent goals, direction, purpose, and meaning in life which enhances the quality of life and wellbeing of older adults, especially in times of hardship (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Specifically, spirituality may manifest in everyday life in the form of practices such as prayer, meditation, contemplation, chanting, singing, dancing, communication with spiritually minded others, caring for others, and reading spiritual material (Ray & McFadden, 2001). Silence, a quiet mind, and simple attention create a mind set which nurtures such everyday spirituality (Atchley, 1997).

Many studies employ quantitative measures to determine the role and importance of spirituality (e.g., Exline, Yali, & Sanderson, 2000; Hall & Edwards,

2002; Hays, Meador, Branch, & George, 2001; Kass, Friedman, Lesserman, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991; Trenholm, Trent, & Compton, 1998). There are many instruments for ascertaining an individual's 'level' of spirituality, such as the Spiritual Support Scale, Spiritual Assessment Inventory, and the Index of Core Spiritual Experiences (as cited in Hill & Pargament, 2003). These measures rely on responses to rate statements, such as, "I experience a close personal relationship with God." "When faced with a question, I work together with God to figure it out." "I am aware of God attending to me in times of need." "How close do you feel to God?" (Hill & Pargament, 2003, p. 67). It is questionable whether quantitative measures can tap the meaning of spirituality and hence whether spirituality can be quantified. Spirituality is by its very nature ineffable (Atchley, 1997) and so any attempt to quantify spirituality may do so at the cost of its essential phenomenological essence. In this context, perhaps qualitative studies are able to get closer to the essence of spirituality because they permit subjective, exploratory, and in-depth descriptions of participants' lived experiences.

In summary, spirituality develops with changing life conditions, both inwardly and outwardly. Extrinsic and intrinsic changes in life conditions facilitate the opening and deepening of spirituality in older adulthood. It has been useful to conceptualise the developmental processes involved in spirituality for older adults because herein lies an opportunity to enhance spirituality as a means to psychosocial wellbeing in older adulthood.

Spirituality and Psychosocial Wellbeing

Spirituality has been linked with the psychosocial development of late adulthood. In a longitudinal study, Wink and Dillon (2003) found that spirituality

was associated with three key psychosocial areas: a source of wellbeing, involvement in everyday life tasks, and generativity and wisdom. Generativity (vs. self-absorption) is the seventh stage in Erikson's psychosocial theory of lifespan development and it regards the concern of taking care of future generations (Dillon, Wink, & Fay, 2003). Integrity (vs. despair) is the eighth and final stage in Erikson's theory and refers to older adults' wisdom derived from lived experiences. Wink and Dillon's longitudinal study focused on interviews when participants were in their 50s, 60s, and 70s ($N = 181$, 53% females and 47% males). An interesting finding was that participants who were higher in religion showed generativity (stage seven), whereas participants higher in spirituality showed integrity (stage eight). Wink and Dillon found that spiritual older adults were introspective, had developed complex ways of thinking, and were insightful of human suffering. Likewise, a study by Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery, and Colwell (2006) found that participants who had an "achieved" spiritual identity were the most articulate and elaborative in discussing their spirituality (p. 1274). In the Kiesling et al. study, spiritual identity was defined as "a persistent sense of self that addresses ultimate questions about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life, resulting in behaviors that are consonant with the individual's core values" (p. 1269).

Kiesling et al. (2006) conducted an exploratory qualitative study into the psychosocial spiritual self ($N = 28$). The participants were selected because they were known to be devoutly spiritual and they ranged in age from 22 to 72 (females = 15, males = 13). Three identities emerged from the data. As just mentioned, achieved spiritual persons ($n = 13$) tended to have experienced a non-normative trauma (e.g., cancer, accident, untimely death of a loved one, or bankruptcy), they

had struggled through the crisis, and subsequently emerged with a deeper understanding of life (Kiesling et al., 2006). Achieved spiritual participants were able to draw on spiritual resources by making meaning out of their suffering. The second identity to emerge was “moratorium” ($n = 4$) and whilst these participants had engaged in spiritual exploration, their spirituality remained unreconciled (p. 1273). The third identity was “foreclosed” ($n = 11$, p. 1271). These participants were highly committed to spirituality without having explored alternative options, that is, participants had been raised within a religious household and had unquestioningly accepted that faith and had not explored alternative spiritual paths. Jacobson et al. (2006) came to a similar conclusion in a smaller qualitative study of adults diagnosed with HIV/AIDS ($N = 19$; age range 34-62; females = 5, males = 14) but used different labels for the three spiritual identities: collaborative believer, spiritual seeker, and deferring believer, respectively. Each label depicted the same identity but the first set (achieved, moratorium, and foreclosed) seems to emphasise the status of spiritual identity whereas the second set (collaborative believer, spiritual seeker, and deferring believer) seems to emphasise the belief system of their spiritual identity.

A larger ($N = 195$) quantitative study found several relationships among the psychosocial development of two cohorts of older adults ($n = 99$, M age = 55; $n = 96$, M age = 78) who had made applications for vision rehabilitation services (Brennan, 2002). Spirituality functioned to buffer stressful life events, in this case the loss of eye sight, by reframing the event, for example, as an opportunity for personal growth (Brennan, 2002). A major finding of the study was that spirituality

exerted the greatest effect, as measured with self-ratings, under the most adverse conditions, that is, when vision loss had the most negative life impact.

In summary, spirituality performs a significant role in psychosocial wellbeing and daily functioning in older adulthood. Achieved, moratorium, or foreclosed spiritual identities are labels that may be used to distinguish an individual's stage of spiritual development. Spirituality also manifests differentially in psychosocial stages of generativity and integrity. By recognising the significant role of spirituality and understanding an individual's psychosocial functioning, psychological care may be targeted to meet individual's needs in older adulthood. Future research, in an Australian context, could be targeted to understand what and how spiritual needs can be best met at each psychosocial stage of generativity and integrity. Just as psychosocial needs in older adulthood are important, so too are health concerns which are discussed next.

Spirituality and Health

Health concerns are paramount in older adulthood because ageing is associated with health losses and limitation. Spirituality has been linked with positive health outcomes. Powell, Shahabi, and Thoresen (2003) analysed 28 longitudinal studies to examine the relationship between spirituality, religion, and physical health. These studies indicated that, firstly, "persuasive" evidence was found that church or service attendance is related to longevity (Powell et al., 2003, p. 39). After adjusting for risk factors (i.e., life style, social support, and depression), there was a 25% reduction in mortality during the study periods. Secondly, there was "some" evidence that spirituality and/or religion related to reduced risk of cardiovascular disease (Powell et al., 2003, p. 39). Crowther et al. (2002) suggested that spiritually or religiously

committed individuals are more likely to engage in healthy behaviours and have supportive family and community networks. Thirdly, there was “some” evidence that being *prayed for* improved recovery from acute illness (Powell et al., 2003, p. 39). Finally, there was also “some” evidence that a negative experience of spirituality or religion *impedes* recovery from acute illness (Powell et al., 2003, p. 39). It was reported that a negative relationship with the transcendent, for example, believing that the transcendent had abandoned the ill person, was associated with poorer prognosis. In this study, the psychological implications of spirituality in older adulthood was that a positive psychological experience of spirituality was linked with better health and a negative psychological experience of spirituality is linked with poorer health.

A series of studies by Gall (2002, 2003b, & 2004) in Canada addressed spiritual factors in the experience of breast cancer, prostate cancer, and illness in older adulthood. All three studies found that most participants maintained a generally benevolent relationship with the transcendent. When participants attributed their illness to the transcendent’s love, there was a tendency to interpret the illness as a positive event and with a positive outcome such as spiritual growth. The transcendent’s benevolence was a common theme where difficult life situations were appraised as “spiritual challenges” (Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005, p. 75). Specifically, participants appraised a spiritual challenge as a test from the transcendent and as an opportunity for spiritual growth, which was related with positive health outcomes (Pargament et al., 2005). On the other hand, participants who attributed their illness to the transcendent’s anger, had a tendency to self-blame and believed that their illness was under their control, which had a potentially

negative effect on their health. The relationship between positive health outcomes with a benevolent transcendent and negative health outcomes with self-blame was seen in the women in Gall and Cornblat's (2002) breast cancer study ($N = 39$, M age = 55), the men in Gall's (2003b) prostate cancer study ($N = 34$, M age = 66), and the older adults in Gall's (2004) coping with illness study ($N = 75$, M age = 64).

A prominent theme within the literature on spirituality is the Cognitive Model of Adjustment (Gall & Cornblat, 2002). That is, spiritual beliefs create a framework for meaning making where "attributions can serve as a source of meaning by situating the illness within a greater life context (e.g., God's will/purpose) and this may help older adults persevere in the face of stress" (Gall & Cornblat, 2002, p. 218). It is as if the power of spiritual belief is in the potential to create one's inner peace. This hypothesis is depicted in a quote of one of the breast cancer survivors in Gall and Cornblat's (2002) study who had stage four incurable cancer, "...I have come to a place in life where I feel peaceful and strong. I have developed an abiding faith that no matter what happens I can cope and it will be alright" (p. 530).

In summary, research evidence has shown that positive psychological attributions within a spiritual context lead to more positive health outcomes. When an older adult makes meaning out of their limitations associated with the decline of health, such as the development of inner strength and resilience, they are likely to fare better than those who do not emerge with positive attributions to their struggles. Health issues may increase the awareness of mortality and of a limited lifespan, therefore, end of life issues increase in prominence in older adulthood (Sulmasy, 2006) and these will be explored next.

Spirituality and End of Life Issues

Death is unavoidable. As people age and perceive that they are nearing the end of life they entertain questions of meaning, value, and relationship (Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005). Pastoral and psychological care enable end of life issues to be processed and this may facilitate wellbeing and quality of life at life's end (Sulmasy, 2006). Professionals need to be aware of the spiritual needs of the dying and be adept at meeting these needs (or refer clients appropriately) (Atchley, 1997). Psychologists have traditionally been regarded as less spiritual (and religious) than the general population (Smith & Orlinsky, 2004). This perception may lead older adults to avoid psychological treatment for fear that their spiritual concerns will be ignored or undervalued (Gall, 2003a). For those older adults who sought psychotherapy, a spiritual life review intervention has had some success in processing end of life issues (Lewis, 2001). Lewis, in an indepth case study of a terminally-ill 67 year old female residing in a nursing home, reported that the client shifted from a state of despair (she was experiencing suicidal thoughts) upon initial consultation to feelings of integrity close to the time of her death. Lewis stressed the need to develop the therapeutic alliance before beginning spiritual life review sessions and argued for the use of the spiritual life review to promote the healthy development of the individual nearing life's end. The literature highlights three primary spiritual needs of older adults: a need for meaning, value, and relationship.

Meaning. The question often raised is, "What has my life meant?" (Sulmasy, 2006). Erikson's theory of psychosocial development suggests that the resolution of such a big question could be resolved with integrity or, the less desirable alternative, despair (Lewis, 2001). In a qualitative study of 63 adults (female = 18, male = 45;

Male = 56) who were terminally-ill with HIV/AIDS, spirituality in the form of searching for meaning was an important resource for wellbeing (Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002). As the participants' searched for meaning of their illness and impending death, finding meaning reduced fear and uncertainty as they contemplated death and the afterlife. Viktor Frankl's (1984) autobiographical book (*Man's Search for Meaning*) of his experiences at Nazi concentration camps, spoke directly of man's search for meaning as a crucial factor in survival, which kept him alive during those years of emaciation, deprivation, humiliation, and grief.

Value. Toward the end of their lives, people need to be valued, supported, and affirmed by significant others (Sulmasy, 2006). Being valued can evoke feelings of peace, tranquillity, and contentment (Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002). In the Siegel and Schrimshaw study, valued adults with HIV/AIDS nearing death experienced less emotional burden.

Relationships. There are several relationships interacting: with one's self, with others, and with the transcendent. The Reverend interviewed in the Sulmasy (2006) study on the spiritual issues in the care of the dying, noted that dying people seemed to make a connection between their 'broken' bodies and their 'broken' relationships.

Perhaps there is resentment from the past, things unsaid or undone that need to be reconciled to facilitate integrity toward dying. The spiritual life review has been recommended as a means of healing through a process of reconciliation. In regards to the dying person's relationship with the transcendent, Sulmasy (2001) stated that the quality of the dying person's life is dependent upon the quality of the relationship that they have with the transcendent. Indeed, this tenet is supported in Siegel and Schrimshaw's (2002) study where adults dying from HIV/AIDS and who

were higher in spirituality found strength, power, and control as they prayed, found relief from feelings of hopelessness, and came to terms with their impending death. The participants' relationship with the transcendent provided support and a sense of belonging, sheltering them from feelings of isolation and marginalisation (Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002).

In summary, it seems necessary to meet the spiritual needs of the dying in order to facilitate psychological and spiritual wellness toward life's end. The three primary spiritual needs of meaning, value, and relationship may be addressed in a spiritual life review during pastoral or psychological care. Research on spiritual life reviews could illuminate the processes, outcomes, cultural differences, and training needs of professionals who care for older adults. An examination of spirituality and culture is considered next.

Spirituality and Culture

In a theoretical article on cross-cultural perspectives of spirituality in older adulthood, Jernigan (2001) theorised that culture influences spirituality via an organising principle around which the individual's life manifests. This resonates with the earlier tenet that spirituality is a filter (or lens) through which life passes and directs behaviour (Boswell, Kahana, & Dilworth-Anderson, 2006).

Jernigan (2001) presented a case study of two culturally diverse individuals contrasting the spiritual aspects of their lives. One was an American Christian male who died in his mid nineties. The other was a Taiwanese Buddhist female (no age cited other than "older adult") who lived in America for several years with her son's family in the care of her grandchildren. For the American culture, spirituality tended to be individualistic and focused on the person (Jernigan, 2001). Conversely for the

Taiwanese culture, spirituality tended to be collectivistic and focused on the community (Jernigan, 2001). These differences exerted their influence on these individuals' everyday lives. For example, the Taiwanese mother derived meaning from caring for her family members and so she relocated to a foreign country (i.e., America) to gain that meaning after her husband died. However, she experienced losses and limitation with language barriers and by not connecting to a Buddhist community. Her spirituality enabled her to accept, cope with, and transcend these losses and limitations. She decided to learn English and return to her homeland once her role as caregiver lessened.

In contrast, relationships with family were also important to the American, but he did not live with family members as did the Taiwanese woman. The American relocated to another American city, to be closer to his offspring when his wife died, and moved into a nursing home. Furthermore, the American's individualistic values of independence left him rather isolated because, as reported by Jernigan (2002), he stayed in his room with only "occasional visitors, mostly family members" (p. 425). Listening to music became a spiritual resource as listening to music transcended the limitations of blindness (unable to read) which developed with advanced age (Jernigan, 2002).

The African American culture is also deemed to be collectivistic. Just as spirituality tends to become a filter for Western older adults, spirituality is also a worldview for African Americans but their spirituality is a central and innate facet of their cultural experience (opposed to developing with changing life conditions) (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002). Other important differences that were evident in the literature on the African American culture were that older adults were revered, their

wisdom often valued, and death was viewed as transcending to another stage of life, opposed to an end unto itself. These differences between the African American and White American cultures were confirmed by Harvey and Silverman (2007). Harvey and Silverman conducted interviews ($N = 88$) with ethnically matched African American and White American older adults exploring the role of spirituality in the self-management of chronic illness. A similarity was that prayer played a central role in the self-management of chronic illness and participants used prayer as a direct channel to the transcendent. A cultural difference was that African Americans perceived "God (as) the enabler" (p. 213). For the African American, the transcendent was perceived to work through the doctor who treated them and the participant surrendered their illness to the transcendent. In contrast, there was a tendency for White American older adults to believe that they had personal control over their illness and an increased tendency to attribute self-blame for the illness.

In summary, culture is a psychosocial variable which influences the spiritual wellbeing of older adults and their everyday spirituality. Some individuals are born into cultures whose fundamental worldview is spiritual whereas other people, like White Americans, may mature into a spiritual worldview with changing life circumstances. Whilst each perspective is equally valid, it is important to acknowledge the cultural influence on spirituality as this can provide useful information for psychological practice when developing intervention plans.

Spirituality and Psychological Practice

The literature has demonstrated the importance of spirituality in older adulthood in terms of needs, end of life issues, cultural differences, health, and psychosocial development. In the context of psychological practice, it should be asked: do clients

want to discuss spiritual issues in therapy and are therapists competent to process clients' spiritual issues?

Rose, Westefeld, and Ansley (2001) argue that clients do believe that spirituality is an appropriate topic within the therapeutic setting. In their study of 74 counselling clients, participants who supported this view had more previous spiritual experiences. The participants were relatively young (M age = 32) and predominantly female (female = 87%, male = 13%). The authors determined participants' religious affiliation (60% presently affiliated, 40% no affiliation), but not how they identified themselves spirituality.

Whilst clients may believe that spiritual concerns are suitable for therapy, such discussion need not be imposed by the therapist. Assessment of spiritual functioning could be conducted as part of the intake process, however, this is not common (Hathaway, Scott, & Garver, 2004). Two studies found that only 23% ($N = 333$) and 36% ($N = 25$) of intake assessment evaluated spiritual functioning and yet the same participants (78% and 72% respectively) considered spirituality to be an important life area (Hathaway et al., 2004).

This low level of spiritual assessment in therapeutic settings may reflect a lack of training that psychologists receive in formal education. In the U.S., there is a distinct lack of spiritual education in psychology courses (Hage, 2006) and predoctoral internships (Russell & Yarhouse, 2006). The pattern in Australia is similar for accredited psychology degrees (Australian Psychological Society, 2007). In a study analysing the practices of 139 predoctoral internship sites in the U.S., 41% provided services to older adults, however, 65% did not offer spiritual or religious training as a major content area and only 35% of sites provided didactic training (Russell &

Yarhouse, 2006). Spirituality was discussed most frequently (91%) within the intern-supervision relationship and was primarily broached in response to a specific client or demonstrating cultural diversity competence. It is interesting to note that the low level of training on spiritual content persists despite 27% of sites having at least one faculty member with a major area of interest in spirituality or religion and 18% of faculty members having published scholarly work on spirituality or religion (Russell & Yarhouse, 2006).

In summary, it appears that clients are willing but practitioners may not be well prepared as pastoral workers to process older adults' spiritual concerns. Crowther et al. (2002) recommend that referral to, or collaboration with, pastoral care workers be made if the therapist's expertise is limited. Future studies could address whether professional needs, in the area of spirituality, are being met within supervision.

Summary

The literature reviewed thus far demonstrates that spirituality is personally important to older adults, and that empirical evidence link spirituality to psychological wellbeing and physical health in older adulthood. Longitudinal and cross-sectional reports indicate that spirituality is of increasing significance and importance to older adults. It was evident that spiritual development is related to changing life conditions, both externally and internally, plus an interaction with the spiritual community that validates one's spirituality. Spirituality is important to an individual's psychosocial wellbeing and three spiritual identities were discussed: achieved, moratorium, and foreclosed. The Cognitive Model of Adjustment is an important framework to understand the process involved in developing inner peace through spiritual meaning making. By reframing stressful or traumatic life events

into a positive experience, spirituality serves to ease emotional distress. Spiritual needs, such as meaning, value, and relationship, may be processed through a spiritual life review. In psychological practice it is important to acknowledge and identify the cultural influence on spirituality when working with clients and to refer or collaborate with pastoral care workers as necessary.

Conclusion

Given the large projected increase in the proportion of Australian older adults and the personal importance placed on spirituality in the lives of older adults, it is timely to investigate the role of spirituality in the everyday lives of older Australians. Whilst the literature demonstrates substantial evidence linking spirituality as a psychological resource for wellbeing, health, and dealing with end of life issues, there is a lack of Australian research in the area. Research into the spirituality of Australian older adults is necessary to understand whether the afore-reviewed literature also pertains to Australian older adults. This knowledge may be used to provide better professional care to older adults, to inform policy making in regards to services available to meet the spiritual needs of Australia's increasing aged population, to inform young people and reduce intergenerational tensions, and to enhance the quality of life in older adulthood.

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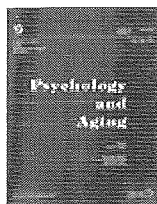
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Running head: SPIRITUALITY IN OLDER ADULTHOOD

The Role and Meaning of Spirituality Among Older Adults in Western Australia

Sue Grossman

A Report Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of
Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) Honours, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science,

Edith Cowan University

Submitted October, 2007

I declare that this written assignment is my own work and does not include:

- (i) Material from published sources used without proper acknowledgement; or
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Sue Grossman

Abstract

The present study explored the role and meaning of spirituality in older adulthood. Ten Western Australians aged over 65 years ($M = 75.7$, $SD = 5.64$; seven females and three males) participated in individual in-depth semi-structured interviews. Principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis were utilised as a theoretical framework. The research questions were: What is the meaning of spirituality in older adulthood and what is the role of spirituality in older adulthood? Three themes emerged from the data: connection with a transcendent force, spirituality provides meaning, and fruition of spirituality. The findings indicated that spirituality promotes psychological wellbeing, both in everyday life and when faced with crisis. A limitation of the present study is the homogenous sample, nine participants were Christian and one was Atheist, which limits transferability. Future studies could include samples from various faiths, such as Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism for deeper understanding of similarities and differences.

Keywords: spirituality, older adulthood, Australian, qualitative, a transcendent force, resilience, psychological wellbeing.

Researcher: Sue Grossman

Supervisor: Dr. Eyal Gringart

Submitted: October 2007

The Role and Meaning of Spirituality Among Older Adults in Western Australia

Australia's age structure is shifting and this creates new social opportunities as well as challenges. By 2031, Australia's population aged over 65 years is projected to increase from 2.6 million in 2004 to 5.8 million, which equates to 13% and 22% of the total population respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2006a). Advancing age is associated with psychological, physical, and social losses and limitations (Kirby, Coleman, & Daley, 2004). Spirituality is one life area which strengthens with advancing age and, in older adulthood, enhances quality of life (Hamarat, Thompson, Steele, Matheny, & Simons, 2002), physical health (Powell, Shahabi, & Thoresen, 2003), psychosocial wellbeing (Wink & Dillon, 2003), and resilience (Crowther, Parker, Achenbaum, Larimore, & Koenig, 2002). Therefore, it is beneficial to understand the role and meaning of spirituality and its psychological implications to Australian older adults because it is a means to transcend losses and limitations associated with advancing age.

Spirituality is defined as "a relationship with a transcendent force that brings meaning and purpose to one's existence, and affects the way in which one operates in the world" (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002, p. 4). Spirituality is differentiated from religion; spirituality is personal and religion is institutionalised (Russell & Yarhouse, 2006). The key areas of spirituality that research has focused on are spiritual development, psychosocial wellbeing, physical health, death, and culture. Whilst the majority of this research was conducted in the U.S., some work has been conducted in Canada and Britain, and no studies were found which utilised samples of Australian older adults. Whilst there are some writers on spirituality in Australia whose publications are primarily books, their focus are in different areas, which are

beyond the scope of this review. For example, Elizabeth MacKinlay (2006) has focused on spirituality and dementia from a pastoral perspective and David Tacey (2004) focused on youth spirituality. Therefore, it is beneficial to assess the applicability of foreign research, on psychological implications of spirituality in older adulthood, to an Australian context.

Spiritual Development

Spiritual development is an individual and lifelong process (Wink & Dillon, 2003). Three factors have been proposed as influencing the development of one's spirituality: environmental changes, internal changes, and spiritual community (Atchley, 1997). Environmental changes are those external events, which occur naturally within the social environment and are associated with having more free time, such as, retirement, empty nesting (children are independent and have left the family home), and secure income. With retirement, it becomes socially acceptable for the older adult to lead a quieter life, with more time for reflection and contemplation on the larger meaning of life (Atchley, 1997).

With advancing age, environmental changes may coincide with an awareness of internal changes. There may be an increased awareness that one has lived more years than one has yet to live (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002). This can be a point of despair, when such existential issues of death are brought to bear, and may motivate a contemplation on the meaning and purpose of one's life (Lewis, 2001). Spirituality enables meaning to be found beyond everyday living (Crowther et al., 2002), therefore, it is useful to explore the role of spirituality as older Australian adults negotiate these existential psychological concerns.

Environmental and internal changes take place within the context of a community (Atchley, 1997). Spiritual community is of personal importance because it validates the reality of one's spiritual life, which may not be shared with the community at large (Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002). For example, a direct experience of a transcendent force may only be validated by others who have also had this experience (Atchley, 1997). It becomes evident that the spiritual community is an essential resource for social support when considering the impact of the environmental and internal changes associated with ageing. These include loss of sensory acuity, decreased mobility, declining social network, death or divorce of partner, and minimal support from independent offspring. Therefore, it is advantageous to explore the psychological implications of the role and meaning of spirituality for Australian older adults, particularly for their psychological wellbeing.

Spirituality and Psychosocial Wellbeing

It has been suggested that spirituality is associated with three psychosocial areas: as a source of wellbeing, involvement in everyday life tasks, and generativity and integrity (Dillon, Wink, & Fay, 2003; Wink & Dillon, 2003). Spirituality plays an important role in preserving a sense of wellbeing amidst the physical losses and social limitations encountered with ageing (Kirby et al., 2004). Meaning making is a cognitive process facilitating the transcendence of these losses and limitations (Gall & Cornblat, 2002). The ability to make meaning out of one's suffering, for example, by reframing a crisis as an opportunity for personal or spiritual growth, is a source of wellbeing as it results in acceptance and peace (Brennan, 2002). The Cognitive Model of Adjustment explains spiritual beliefs as a framework where "attributions can serve as a source of meaning by situating the illness within a greater life context

(e.g., God's will/purpose) and this may help older adults persevere in the face of stress" (Gall & Cornblat, 2002, p. 218). The ability to find meaning in one's suffering creates acceptance, which is healing (Sulmasy, 2001). Therefore, it is important to explore ways in which Australian older adults utilise their spirituality to find meaning and overcome the losses and limitations associated with ageing. It may also improve their physical health in older adulthood.

Spirituality and Physical Health

Research evidence indicates that spirituality is linked with positive health outcomes in older adulthood (Powell et al., 2003). Crowther et al. (2002) found that spiritually committed individuals are more likely to engage in healthy behaviours and have supportive family and community networks. There is also "some" evidence that being *prayed for* improves recovery from acute illness and that a negative experience of spirituality or religion *impedes* recovery from acute illness (Powell et al., 2003, p. 39). Spirituality facilitates acceptance of normative physical declines, such as with deteriorating eye sight, physical strength, and hearing (Boswell, Kahana, & Dilworth-Anderson, 2006). Deteriorating health may also increase the awareness of mortality and of a limited lifespan, therefore, end of life issues may increase in prominence in older adulthood (Sulmasy, 2006).

Spirituality and Death

Research has identified three primary spiritual needs of people who are acutely aware of their impending death: meaning, value, and relationship (Sulmasy, 2006). Nearing life's end, feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness can position the dying person in a existential crisis. This is particularly evident in two studies where participants were terminally-ill with HIV/AIDS and needed to find meaning in their

life in order to die with integrity (Jacobson, Luckhaupt, Delaney, & Tsevat, 2006; Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002). Nearly four decades earlier, Frankl (1969) postulated that despair can be transformed at life's end by finding meaning in one's death. He cited an anecdote of a client who found that courage in her death may be her greatest achievement, as opposed to just experiencing a meaningless premature death. Lewis (2001), in an indepth case study of a terminally-ill 67 year old female residing in a nursing home, reported that the client shifted from a state of despair upon initial consultation (she was experiencing suicidal ideations) to feelings of integrity close to the time of her death. Through a process of Spiritual Life Review she was able to reconcile troubled relationships. Some older adults develop a defence mechanism against death, for example, denial. For others, an awareness of death becomes compelling, and so an exploration of the spiritual needs of Australian older adults is beneficial in facilitating psychological and spiritual wellbeing toward life's end. There are also cultural differences in the way that death is perceived.

Spirituality and Culture

Death, prayer, and the perception of control are cultural factors in spirituality. Within the African American culture, older adults view death as transcending to another stage of life, as opposed to an end unto itself (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002). Harvey and Silverman (2007) conducted interviews ($N = 88$) with ethnically matched African American and White American older adults, exploring the role of spirituality in the self-management of chronic illness. Prayer played a positive central role in the self-management of chronic illness and participants of both ethnicities used it as a direct channel to a transcendent force. African Americans believed that a transcendent force was in control, with a transcendent force

perceived to be working through the doctor who treated the participant. In contrast, there was a tendency for White Americans to believe that they had personal control over their illness and they had an increased tendency to attribute self-blame for the illness.

Overall, spirituality was seen to be an important source of wellbeing and resilience during normative losses and limitations occurring in older adulthood.

Present Study

The present study utilised a qualitative methodology to explore the role and meaning of spirituality in a sample of Western Australian older adults. In response to the paucity of Australian research on spirituality in older adulthood, this research contributes to addressing the gap in the body of knowledge and may inform policies and interventions that aim to increase or maintain psychosocial wellbeing in older adulthood. The present research addressed two questions:

1. What is the meaning of spirituality in older adulthood?
2. What is the role of spirituality in older adulthood?

Method

Research Design

A qualitative research design was employed to explore the role and meaning of spirituality for older adults aged over 65. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted, which allowed for the personal nature of spirituality to be studied as participants were encouraged to disclose their own definitions, ways of talking, and ways of thinking about their lived experience (Lavie & Willig, 2005). The design incorporated principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which is distinguished from other phenomenological methods in its emphasis on the role of

the researcher in the interpretation of participants' meanings (Langdridge, 2007). IPA is appropriate because spirituality takes on meaning as it becomes symbolically significant through the shared interpretations of others (Atchley, 1997). As with phenomenological methods in general, IPA is concerned with the subjective lived experiences and the personal perceptions of the participants, as opposed to a single objective reality (Creswell, 1998).

Participants

A sample of 10 participants was recruited through advertising in the Council on the Ageing (COTA) newsletter. COTA is an independent consumer organisation run by and for senior Australians (<http://www.cota.org.au>). A generalised sampling approach was taken whereby participants self-selected into the research. A total of 24 enquiries were received and the first participants available for interview during the study period were interviewed.

Participants were from a homogenous cultural background, but occupational roles ranged from homemaker to nurse to university lecturer. All participants were Anglo-Celtic, community-residing, and from the Perth metropolitan area. Participants ranged in age from 68 to 85 years ($M = 75.7$, $SD = 5.64$). There were seven women and three men.

Six participants were from three married couples and two were widowed, one divorced, and one married. The readership demographics of the COTA newsletter demonstrated a good fit to gender distribution (60% female readership; 70% present study). All had independent children; some of whom were residing overseas or in the eastern states of Australia.

Nine participants were Christian and one was Atheist. The dominance of Christians may be due to cohort effects as it was the norm for people of that generation to be affiliated with a religion (ABS, 2006b). In 2001, 82% of persons aged over 65 years identified themselves as Christian, compared with 60% of 18-24 year olds (ABS, 2006b).

Ethics

Approval was received from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Computing, Health, and Science at Edith Cowan University prior to commencing the study. Confidentiality was guaranteed to participants and was stringently maintained throughout the research process. All identifying references were omitted during transcription. Tape recordings were destroyed using professional erasure techniques. All research data will be stored at the School of Psychology for a minimum of five years.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants telephoned the researcher in response to the advertisement placed in the COTA newsletter and received an information letter (Appendix A). Interviews were arranged for a time mutually convenient to both the researcher and the interviewee and were conducted at participants' residence. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was tape recorded with the participant's written consent (Appendix B). Participants were advised that their involvement was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Data were collected between July and September 2007. Each interview was transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix C) comprising open-ended questions was developed. One pilot interview was conducted to test the face validity of the interview schedule and suitability of the questions. Consequently, questions were reworded and several discarded. Interview questions evolved as the study progressed (Langdridge, 2007). For example, the question, "Could you please describe a typical day for you and how your spirituality is expressed during your day?" was eliminated after the first three interviews as it failed to elicit meaningful responses. The opening question was, "When you think of spirituality, what comes to mind?" and the interviewee's response was followed with an unscheduled probe to elicit a concrete answer. This approach is consistent with the IPA methodology as a symbolic interactionist approach; the researcher attempts to get close to the personal world of the interviewee, yet it is acknowledged that this can never be achieved directly or completely (Smith, 1999).

Unscheduled probes were frequently used to gain an understanding of participants' thoughts, feelings, and meanings and to minimise the researcher's assumptions. The in-depth semi-structured interview format was conducive to exploring older adults' lived experiences and rapport was developed to facilitate thick descriptions and meaningful discussions. At the conclusion of each interview, the interviewee was debriefed and given an opportunity to have any questions answered. Shortly after the interview, the researcher completed a contact summary form (Appendix D) which facilitated researcher reflexivity.

Rigour

According to McWilliam (2000), the credibility of qualitative research is determined by the readers. It is the researcher's responsibility to clearly demonstrate

and detail the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and dependability of the findings. In this study, multiple viewpoints of the researcher's understanding of the data were gathered. Debriefing was conducted with the researcher's supervisor, which helped clarify assumptions and offered a more informed point of view. Peer member checking was also conducted: Two transcribed interviews were given to a peer who analysed the data and tabulated themes and subthemes. The results were compared with the researcher's own formulation, and there was high interrater agreement between the two. Where differences in terminology and positioning of themes arose, discussion ensued to clarify reasoning and this process facilitated confidence in the final themes and subthemes.

Research accountability was maintained with an audit trail. Bracketing involves consciously identifying and setting aside areas of potential bias so that they do not influence the findings (Creswell, 1998). Through a process of reflective journaling, the researcher sought to bracket the inevitable influence on the analysis process (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). An audit trail was maintained with detailed memoing of the researcher's reasoning, especially at the interpretation of findings stage.

Credibility was achieved by continually returning to the original transcripts and grounding the findings in the participants' voices. The researcher verified the emergent themes with two participants and participants agreed that the researcher's analysis represented their accounts. Finally, transferability, the applicability of the research findings to other contexts or settings, was examined in the discussion section.

Data Analysis

Data analysis commenced immediately following the transcription of each interview, as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), so that analysis informed the research. IPA methods were followed. Initially the researcher was immersed in the data with a minimum of two slow and careful readings of the transcripts. Pertinent key words or phrases were highlighted and spontaneous associations and interpretations that emerged were recorded in the right hand margin. Emerging themes were then noted in the left hand margin. Data were also reduced into a data display matrix (Lyons, 2000), which facilitated identification of similarities and differences across participants. A table of themes and subthemes for each participant was formed. The final step was to produce a consolidated table of themes and subthemes for the group of participants as a whole, which linked the original participants' quotes to each theme and subtheme. Recursive analysis, of continually returning to the original transcripts, and meetings with the researcher's supervisor, assisted with the development of the final emergent themes. Taken together, these processes strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings.

Findings and Interpretations

Overall, participants viewed spirituality as a significant and inseparable aspect of their lives. With the exception of one, all interviewees related spirituality with a meaning of life, coping, and daily functioning. Three major themes emerged from the data: connection with a transcendent force, spirituality provides meaning, and fruition of spirituality. Themes and subthemes (Table 1) are introduced and illustrated with extracts from the interview transcripts to support interpretations. It is

noteworthy that the ineffable nature of spirituality came through, as finding “the right words” to describe spirituality and spiritual experiences was difficult at times.

I usually pride myself on being able to pick the right words, but I couldn’t quite think of the right words sometimes to describe just exactly what I felt to answer your questions as precisely as I could. (Male, 75)

Table 1. *Themes and Subthemes*

	Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1	Connection with a transcendent force	Conversion; Relationship with a transcendent force; Awareness of the presence of a transcendent force; Prayer as a primary spiritual practice.
Theme 2	Spirituality provides meaning	Spiritually driven life; Spirituality provides significance beyond normal consumer society; Connection with others.
Theme 3	Fruition of spirituality	Spirituality is a source of resilience; Spirituality is transformative; Spirituality is learned.

The reader is reminded of the definition of spirituality used in the present study as “a relationship with a transcendent force that brings meaning and purpose to one’s existence, and affects the way in which one operates in the world” (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002, p. 4). The first theme, connection with a transcendent force, was the precondition for the other two themes. A relationship with a transcendent force was

the foundation upon which spirituality could function in the everyday lives and activities of those studied.

Spirituality, virtually, I base my whole lifestyle on my relationship to God. So spirituality to me is my relationship to God and putting that into practice in my life.

(Female, 77)

Theme 1. Connection with a Transcendent Force

Conversion. James (1902/1982) defines conversion as an event that results in a transformation and causes a person to lead a new life. The conversion is relevant here because it defines a moment in time when participants came to believe in the existence of a transcendent force, as opposed to taking the word of authority figures, and it demarcates a transition point of placing a new importance on spirituality in their lives. There were four processes evident in the participants' stories. Firstly, six participants grew up knowing a transcendent force.

I grew up knowing that we shared the house with God, and Jesus was our friend.

(Female, 80)

Secondly, for several participants, being brought up in a religious environment did not suit them and so there was an independent choice for the things of the world (e.g., money, popularity, and power) and, in turn, a denial of spirituality.

I was brought up with the church, believing in God and Jesus. But then you go to your teenage years and you want to explore and you want to see what's going on in the outside world. (Female, 72)

When I left school I left the church as well. I just thought well, no, that's not for me.

(Male, 75)

Thirdly, people who grew up in a religious household were drawn back to a connection with a transcendent force or, for those who had not grown up in a

religious household, were drawn to a connection with a transcendent force, at a time of inner crisis and emptiness.

I married very young. I was in the forces and it wasn't a good marriage. And, um, through all the hurt and the pain I think that's when I turned back to my faith and that really got me through. ... Somehow you always come back because you get that emptiness in your life. You think, oh, there must be more to life than this, going out, having fun and trying to earn money and that's when you slowly come back to your faith. (Female, 72)

The moment of conversion is a significant and important moment in the participants' lives, which became etched in memory even though it occurred decades earlier. The participant in the following extract had a conversion experience at age 11. It is also an example of what Atchley (1997) referred to as a direct mystical experience of a transcendent force.

I prayed this prayer that I had on this plaque and it was as if a beautiful light came in through my window on me, and from then on, I knew that God was with me. (Female, 68)

The Atheist participant did not grow up in a religious household, did not have a connection with a transcendent force, and did not regard spirituality as important. She questioned whether there was a transcendent force and concluded that there was not.

I've never had a belief in God. (Female, 71)

The fourth and final process is that participants living their spirituality hold themselves and others accountable to a principled code of conduct.

If they [spiritual persons] really lived what they believed, they are better people. They will be honest in their work, they will be honest in their dealings with other people. (Female, 77)

Relationship with a transcendent force. Like any interpersonal relationship, a relationship with a transcendent force develops over time.

There was a trial there of getting to trust God because I got to know her [wife], and love her, and then before we really got too serious she said, "Actually, my mum and dad are taking me to Australia." Owweeee, that was a bit of a blow! And, ah, as part of my spiritual journey, I sort of talked to God about that. And I believe he gave me a promise ...and I just took that as a personal word and tried to hang onto it through thick and thin. ... So, that was, you know, learning to trust God in what, for me at that time was, perhaps a little thing now looking back, but when you are 21 that's a big thing.

(Male, 69)

Over the decades a trusting relationship with a transcendent force is developed and this relationship serves participants in older adulthood as it is a source of comfort and support in dealing with loneliness, grief, and illness.

I don't feel God will stop me from having an accident, but I will get the support, um, to cope with whatever happens. And I can't say that I've had an easy life in any way. A daughter who wasn't supposed to live and a son who had brain damage and was unconscious for a couple of months or more and a husband who died after seven weeks deemed unconscious. It was a silly, minor accident. So, you know, you just get the strength to cope. (Female, 80)

Participants' descriptions indicated that a relationship with a transcendent force entailed not only relinquishing control, but relinquishing the need to interpret events and circumstances. In relinquishing this need, participants found equanimity of mind.

There's a lot that we don't know and a lot we don't understand, but I do think that we don't have to delve into them. ... There are things that happen that we can't explain from our understanding. But we don't have to. I think that's the beauty of things....I'm

quite happy to say well, there are things in this world that we won't know about and we'll know about later on. (Female, 80)

Awareness of the presence of a transcendent force. The degree of awareness of the presence of a transcendent force in the participants' everyday lives varied. Most participants spoke of a very strong sense of a transcendent force.

I'm always conscious of the presence of God. (Male, 81)

I feel that, um, spirit is with me whether I'm walking up the street or whether I'm doing the washing. (Female, 85)

In contrast, the Atheist participant had no sense of a transcendent force.

I certainly don't have any feeling of a relationship with a being, or a force out there somewhere or anything like that. (Female, 71)

For spiritual participants, the presence of a transcendent force is known to be real at an "emotional level", rather than being physically manifest.

I've never heard an audible voice. But it's as much as an impression and a sense of peace about having, as it were, gained a sense of what God wants me to do in the circumstance. ... (God's presence) is palpable at an emotional level. (Male, 69)

A personal experience of a transcendent force is conceived of as a tangible relationship; as someone who is always available and can be held onto in times of need.

So I had nobody in this world but God. ... He [God] is there and I've always got Him to hang onto. (Female, 68)

A transcendent force responds to requests for help, especially at times of emotional upheaval. One participant turned to a transcendent force when his first child was born but his own father had died before meeting his grandchild.

I had to hang around for the undertakers to come and take dad away. And when he'd gone I just sort of collapsed and fell into the chair. And just asked God to help me

because I felt so, what am I going to do, you know? And I found the strength to go on.

(Male, 69)

Prayer as a primary spiritual practice. Prayer is the primary spiritual practice by which participants communicate with a transcendent force. Prayer forms part of a daily ritual of practices in addition to meditation, contemplation, and reading scripture. Rituals are often conducted in the morning as a form of communion with a transcendent force, a way of sharing problems and expressing gratitude. Through prayer, some participants came to an inner peace which, even when faced with death, felt that either way, whatever the outcome, everything was alright.

And I used it as a breath prayer, “the eternal God is your refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms”. And through times of anxiety and even at the time of premedication of the surgery and what not, being trundled down on the trolley, ceiling rushing past, I was able to have the sense of calm. And I wasn’t anxious, I was relaxed. And I’ve had the same thing happen subsequently with another procedure I had, transurethral reception of the prostate.... Well, I felt secure in that, whatever the outcome, I was in His arms. Whether I came out of theatre alive or dead, I suppose, that all is well.

(Male, 69)

The saying, “underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27), was referred to by three participants. It is also quoted by a participant in the Gall and Cornblat (2002) study on the spirituality of breast cancer survivors, which suggests it is particularly comforting during illness. Participants spoke of prayer as “connecting” them to a transcendent force in a “deeper way”. That prayer helped them to heal and recover from health problems faster and that praying for others also served to help those prayed for recovery quicker. Communion with a transcendent

force helped participants not only with the healing of the physical body, but also with the healing of relationships.

You know, if at times things have been tense in our marriage, and we've been married 57 years now, there are not many tensions. But I mean, when you've got children, young children, the biggest problems in marriages are children and money. And, um, you know, there have been rough times, well, I found the way getting through them is especially getting off on my own, going on my morning walk and there's nobody around, and there's just you and God. (Female, 77)

Spiritual participants have a strong relationship with a transcendent force. This relationship provides the "strength to go on" at times of emotional crisis. The Atheist participant did not find solace in a relationship with a transcendent force, but rather in connection with others.

Theme 2. Spirituality Provides Meaning

Spirituality was seen to provide meaning to interviewees' lives. Spiritual beliefs were found to guide the participants' behaviour to "do the right thing", provide meaning beyond normal consumer society, and provide meaning through connection with others.

Spiritually driven life. Participants viewed spirituality as influencing their behaviour and pervading all of life.

Letting it [spirituality] affect everything I do in life. (Male, 69)

In contrast to the spiritual participants whose spirituality was inseparable from their everyday lives, the Atheist participant did not perceive that spirituality influenced, nor related to, her everyday life.

I guess, ah, spirituality is thoughts and feelings that are not related to my practical everyday world. (Female, 71)

Many spiritual participants adopted biblical values to guide their own conduct.

For example, two commonly referred to behavioural precepts were 'do unto others as you would have done unto you' and 'love your neighbours and love your enemies'. They operate as a moral code of conduct. The importance of the participants' spiritual belief system is captured in the following extract, exemplifying how spirituality pervades all life areas.

I really can't separate my spiritual belief from anything else in my life because I believe that my whole life has been based on my spiritual belief; the way I treat people, um, the way I worked. ... I worked for (company) and I just kind of did temp work. I believed that the person I was going to work for was entitled to honest work and so I suppose it's affected my life entirely in the way I live my life. (Female, 77)

When asked what life would be like without spirituality, the answers illuminated the paramount role of spirituality. Multiple extracts are provided so that the reader can appreciate the extent to which spirituality is important to the participants. What also comes through is a comparison of life before and after assuming a life of spiritual meaning.

I can't imagine a life without spirituality. I guess it's my perspective on life. (Male, 69)

(Without spirituality) I'd probably be a miserable old woman. (Female, 80)

I know I couldn't walk away from it [spirituality]. And I know what it was like before I accepted Christ. And I couldn't go back to that. Actually, I don't think, I know I couldn't... it's an intricate part of my life. (Male 75)

I could not go back to my drunkenness, or my sex life, or some petty thieving, I couldn't go back to that again ... So the spirituality is the main part of my life. God first, others next, then myself. (Male, 81)

Spirituality provides significance beyond normal consumer society. Older adulthood has been associated with loss of status and power in the transition from

paid employment to retirement (Altschuler, 2004). To counteract these losses, some participants spoke of spirituality providing meaning through doing for others.

I'd done that [bookkeeping] for 14 years so it's not only that, I kind of support the church activities where we're needed and where I've got the ability to do it. (Female, 77)

Even at 85 years old when age prohibits helping in the physical form of driving someone to an appointment or helping someone move house, there is still an intention to spread joy and do for others.

You know, I can't do anything to sort of help other people in a great way now, but, you know, if I can smile at them and they feel someone's appreciating them, or said good-day to them. (Female, 85)

Life can be meaningful when following a transcendent force's direction to a new occupation. For example, one participant found meaning by changing careers from a university lecturer to commencing a bible college, as directed by a transcendent force.

Doing this [pastoral work] is what excites and makes me feel great and I'm doing something worthwhile. (Male, 69)

A common feature of the participants' descriptions was a valuing of the immaterial (e.g., peace) over the material (e.g., money), which provided meaning in life.

Seligman (2000) concluded that materialistic people are not happy because the easy availability of consumer pleasures leaves a yearning for something more meaningful because materialism does not pose significant challenges for personal or spiritual growth.

We have a wonderful life, we have peace in our life and we're debt free. We're not (financially) rich, but we are rich. We're rich in so many ways. (Female, 72)

Connection with others. The relationship between social support and wellbeing has been well established within community psychology literature (e.g., McMillan &

Chavis, 1986). Connection with others is important to all participants. Whereas spiritual participants place primary importance on their relationship with a transcendent force and secondary importance on their relationship with others, the Atheist participant placed sole importance on relationship with others.

Well I don't think spirituality actually plays a big role for me. I'm really quite a practical person. And there are a lot of things, a lot of spiritual things that I don't believe in, like an afterlife, or a God, all that sort of thing. But, um, I just believe a lot in being aware of people who are, who you care about. And really thinking about them.

(Atheist, Female, 71)

Several participants spoke of a reciprocal relationship of being needed, and being in need, that is desirable.

It's a lovely feeling to know that you're welcomed and that people are there to comfort you and pray with you and people are there that you too can give to in return, and that sort of thing. We are there for each other. And it's a lovely sort of sense. (Male, 69)

Losses and limitations associated with advancing age may be conducive of loneliness (e.g., limited mobility, deceased spouse, or geographically distant children); therefore, spiritual community becomes an important source of social support.

Fellowship in your particular group is important because I live alone. (Female, 85)

Sulmasy (2006) found that reconciling broken relationships was important toward life's end, but the present study also found that positive reconciliation was important. Reconciliation involved explicitly verbalising that which remained unsaid and unacknowledged.

I was able to write a letter to her [Aunt], thanking her for having had me, for what she'd done [the participant's Aunt raised her from two years of age, against the Uncle's wishes, when the participant's mother died]. And I managed to do that about 18 months

before she died. So, in that respect, anything that was in my life that hadn't been cleared up, I was able to clear that up and thank her. I'm so glad I did because once they've gone, they've gone and you can say it to them. (Female, 68)

For spiritual participants, their spirituality played an important role in the determinants of their behaviour and provided meaning to everyday life. Relationship with others was important to all participants for psychological wellbeing.

Theme 3. Fruition of Spirituality

Participants spoke of spirituality performing various roles and the resultant benefits.

Indeed, many participants' expected to see benefits of spirituality in their lives.

Now you don't know where it comes from, but you do see the evidence of it. And I believe that a person who's got spirituality, as I understand it, should give indications of the fruitage of that spirituality in their lives. (Male, 81)

Spirituality is a source of resilience. A primary benefit of spirituality, as seen by most participants, is that it tempers psychological suffering. The way that a person deals with life's inevitable struggles may result in despair or comfort.

Spirituality was seen to be a resource through times of pain and suffering.

My father died when I was eight, he literally dropped dead. He dropped dead, he got out of a truck, he said to the men, I'm just going to run up and get a drink of water. They heard a thump and he was dead before he hit the road. ... I remember hearing my mother scream (when the police delivered the news of her husband's death). But, even through that we turned to God to help us through that kind of thing. (Female, 77)

When experiencing grief, spiritual beliefs provide a refuge from the emotional pain. A participant spoke of the hope that her spiritual beliefs gave her and how they soften the mourning process.

Certainly the heartbreak is there, the feeling of devastation and the loneliness of not seeing that person (once they're dead). But there is a certain calmness of believing in the

way that I believe, that the person doesn't know, they can't see you're hurt, they can't see the anguish, they are just, they know nothing, they are there waiting. And it gradually, it probably softens the grief. (Female, 77)

The same participant spoke further about this tempering process and her belief in an afterlife.

Yeah, I have a hope that I will catch up, I will meet up with her [dead younger sister] again. I guess that's how it tempers it [grief] because of a hope that I have.... I do have a hope. If you've got a hope, well it encourages you to go on. (Female, 77)

Death is a harsh reality to deal with if there is no hope. The spiritually inclined participants had hope in the belief of an afterlife. In contrast, the Atheist participant's loss comes without any hope of seeing the person again and, therefore, had hope by believing that the person is kept alive through memories.

You might be feeling the closeness with somebody who has died for example, you might feel that, um, their memory. I mean, yeah, their memory or their memory is the main I would be thinking of. (Female, 71)

Through adversity, spirituality provides the "strength to cope". One participant's son underwent major surgery following a serious motorcycle accident. To cope, the participant took "one day at a time" and surrendered the need for a particular outcome (i.e., the son's survival) to a transcendent force.

And I just sort of felt, um, he was in God's hands, I prayed for the wisdom for the doctors to know what to do, and the hands to be guided, and I went home to three little kids that were huddled together, crying their hearts out, because somebody had told them that their brother was dead. ... But I just sort of feel that whenever you need it you get the strength to carry on. (Female, 80)

Spirituality is also a source of resilience in the face of daily hassles. By valuing and prioritising inner peace, one participant utilised spirituality to deal with annoyances.

Well I could get trolley rage quite easily. Well, your [spiritual person] feelings are no different to anybody else's. People can annoy you and you can annoy other people, um, I think you tend to deal with it just a little better, instead of going into the trolley rage, you just pull back a little bit. (Female, 72)

Spirituality is transformative. When considering how their spirituality had changed across the lifespan, some participants viewed it as a "journey", as a process of inner transformation which occurs over a lifetime.

In my teenage (years), I took a step, the first step on the journey of faith, becoming a Christian and as I've travelled along that journey, much to my surprise, I've become more and more of an upfront person. (Male, 69)

Correcting personal weaknesses and cultivating virtues and personal strengths was a source of meaning for many spiritual participants. Even at 85, there is a continuance of wanting to fulfil ones potential.

If I get anxious, or afraid, or upset about something, ah, then I know that I'm sort of drifting away from the spirit. That's what I'm trying to learn now. To be more calm. To be still. (Female, 85)

For some participants, spiritual beliefs transformed anxiety provoking thoughts of death in older adulthood into peaceful acceptance.

It's [spirituality] got deeper as you get older and, of course, at my age you think you haven't got many more years to go. ... Well I think you've got to be prepared for life and your death. People of my age always think, you know, how long are we going to have? ... I think that spirit goes back to the God who made us. (Believing this way) makes me feel comfortable about death. (Female, 85)

Spirituality is learned. Learning theory (Chance, 2003) states that people learn through observing others' behaviours, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviours. In this context, spirituality was seen to be learned from significant others, especially mothers and grandmothers.

The most spiritual impact would have been my grandmother. Looking back when I was kid, you wouldn't realise that, her attitude and her love and her care, had a Christian basis, a spiritual basis. (Male, 69)

Several spiritual participants spoke of raising their children by the same moral code of conduct that they value.

The way we brought them [our four children] up, we chose to send them to a (name of religious) school so, therefore, we paid fees because we wanted them to have values that we hoped to teach them in our home but we wanted to teach them there. (Female, 77)

Several spiritual participants' learnt vicariously by observing the success of the lives of leaders around them, especially those who were congruent in their speech and action.

The bible class leader was a really top bloke and you really felt that what he was talking about he believed and he lived that sort of life. (Male, 69)

Jesus was seen as the most spiritually evolved person who acted as a role model and to whom these Christian participants compared their behaviour. One participant's charitable behaviour was compared with the actions of Jesus.

It's [provided accommodation to people in need] what Jesus would do. Because he didn't believe in the temple and staying in the temple; he went out amongst the people.

And he loved the people. (Female, 68)

Spiritual participants experienced benefits in their lives from engaging in a spiritually driven life. They noticed how they became better persons by following a spiritual belief system and felt that they also coped better at times of stress.

Discussion

This study presented the personal accounts of spirituality in the lives of 10 Australian older adults. From the analysis, three themes emerged which were

common to all accounts of spiritual participants: connection with a transcendent force, spirituality provides meaning, and fruition of spirituality.

Connection with a Transcendent Force

A connection with a transcendent force was common to all accounts except for one, that is, the Atheist participant. It would be expected that the Atheist participant did not invest in a relationship with a transcendent force because she did not believe in the existence of a transcendent force. On the contrary, the Atheist participant placed personal importance solely on relationship with others and derived a sense of wellbeing from these relationships.

Spiritual participants likened their relationship with a transcendent force to human interpersonal relationships. A relationship with a transcendent force developed over time. The relationship with a transcendent force was relied upon at times of emotional crisis and also felt in everyday life. Consistent with the findings of Brennan's (2002) study where older adults were questioned about the buffering effects of spirituality on stress resulting from vision loss, the participants in the current study found that spirituality buffered stress as it was a source of hope and also enhanced wellbeing. Brennan found that spirituality exerted its strongest effect when participants experienced the most challenging of life circumstances.

Spirituality also played a more significant role for older adults with greater levels of frailty and was a resource for maintaining psychological wellbeing (Kirby et al., 2004). Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery, and Colwell (2006) found that participants who had experienced non-normative traumas tended to be more spiritual. Many participants in the present study have experienced non-normative traumas, such as

the untimely death of a parent as a child, and spirituality appears to have exerted a strong influence in their lives.

The implication to psychological practice is that the personal importance placed on a relationship with a transcendent force needs to be ascertained for older adults. If there is a strong relationship with a transcendent force, then the relationship should be promoted as a source of comfort and support. Conversely, the psychologist may promote the reliance on social networks as a means of support for Atheist clients.

The tendency to surrender control to a transcendent force has been shown to be a cultural aspect of African American spirituality (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002). The present study challenges this literature as many spiritual participants spoke of surrendering control to a transcendent force. This discrepancy in the literature may be indicative of the Christian sample studied or it may also highlight a difference between American and Australian populations, but this could only be determined with a larger-scale quantitative study. Similarly, Gall's (2004) study exploring the role of the relationship with a transcendent force on the quality of life for White Canadian men with prostate cancer found that those who perceived they had personal control over their illness experienced lower wellbeing.

Consistent with the findings of Gall and Cornblat's (2002) study on the long term adjustment to breast cancer, the participants in the present study found certainty in uncertainty. Participants found equanimity of mind and emotional comfort that "either way", whatever the outcome, everything will be alright. Be it dying on the operating table undergoing heart surgery or a son being involved in a motorcycle accident, prayer facilitated an inner strength to cope and find peace, which unfolded in relationship with a transcendent force. Prayer created a bridge for communion

with a transcendent force and, in that union, comfort and support was experienced. The findings of this study are supported, in particular, by studies on illness where prayer performed a central-role in the self-management of illness (Harvey & Silverman, 2005).

Spirituality Provides Meaning

Spirituality was seen to be important as it provided meaning in life to the spiritual older adults studied. Participants found it difficult to conceptualise a life without spirituality. Spiritual participants speculated that without spirituality, life would be barren and meaningless. Yet the Atheist participant found meaning another way, through her interpersonal relationships. Perhaps spiritual participants have greater resilience in the face of hardship because they have a relationship with a transcendent force which adds another stratum of social support.

Meaning originated from relationships with others. This was true for both the spiritual participants and the Atheist participant. Whereas spiritual participants placed the relationship with a transcendent force as primary and others as secondary, the Atheist participant placed sole importance on relationship with others. Given that all spiritual participants were of Christian faith, this dynamic would be expected because basic sermons in the church teach Christians to put a transcendent force as their highest priority (Matt Parkins, personal communication, September 26, 2007). Nonetheless, the meaning that is derived from interpersonal relationships, regardless of spiritual inclination, confirms prior research that emphasise the importance of social support (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The participants in the present study held a long and committed view of Christianity. Marler and Hadaway (2002) sought to understand how people define

religion and spirituality and found that some participants could not talk about spirituality without speaking of religion, as was the case in the present study. Whilst in the present study spirituality helped with some new challenges related to older adulthood, spirituality appeared to hold a consistent importance from the moment of conversion. In contrast, Dillon et al. (2003) found that spirituality became salient after mid life. There did appear to be a strengthening of a relationship with a transcendent force over the lifespan, which was a source of comfort and strength when coping with losses and limitations associated with older adulthood.

Reconciliation with significant others was an important spiritual need. In the Sulmasy (2006) study, reconciliation was only posited within a negative framework, that is, needing to reconcile a broken relationship. However, the present study found that positive reconciliation is important also. To explicitly express thanks and gratitude to a significant other for the blessings they have brought into one's life was equally important as mending a broken relationship. In practice, psychologists may use Spiritual Life Review therapy to enable clients to process relationships which need to be reconciled (Lewis, 2001).

The peace, comfort, and meaning that is derived from a spiritual way of life may facilitate a "good death", as opposed to a "bad death" (Vig, Davenport, & Pearlman, 2002). Women tend to live longer than men (ABS, 2004) and so may be more vulnerable to depression and loneliness in older adulthood (Gatz & Fiske, 2003). Following on from the present findings, a future study could explore ways in which spirituality can be used to buffer depression and loneliness for older women from a Feminist framework.

Fruition of Spirituality

Spiritual participants expected to see the results of leading a spiritual life in themselves and in spiritual others. Without taking a superior or arrogant position, participants felt that they were better off than people without spirituality in their lives. Spirituality was a source of resilience which promoted psychological wellbeing. Taking one day at a time and finding the strength to cope were seen in the present study, and were supported in Gall's (2003a; 2003b) studies on the role of religious and spiritual coping among older adults with illness. A spiritual belief system transcends suffering in a way that alternative socially acceptable methods do not (Atchley, 1997) because excessive use of drugs, alcohol, sex, work, and sport may keep a person on the wheel of suffering instead of freeing them (Trungpa, 2002).

Spirituality was seen to benefit spiritual participants' daily lives, at times of pain and suffering, and with existential issues such as death. Through processes of acceptance and making meaning out of suffering, participants found the strength to cope with challenging life situations. The Cognitive Model of Adjustment (Gall & Cornblat, 2002) suggests that spiritual people use their spiritual beliefs as a framework to position the challenging situation as an opportunity for growth. Spiritual beliefs tempered suffering associated with grief by offering hope of 'seeing' their loved one again. Consistent with reports of individuals living with HIV/AIDS (Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002), the participants in the current study described how their spiritual beliefs and practices facilitated meaning and acceptance of adverse situations. Spiritual beliefs also facilitated an acceptance of death.

The benefits of spirituality were seen in the spiritual participants' lives and in the leaders around them. They wanted to pass the benefits of spirituality onto their children by teaching them the same values. For the participants in this study, spirituality was learnt through processes of vicarious learning, reinforcement, and modelling (Chance, 2003). Jesus was a role model for the Christian participants' own behaviour; however, it is hypothesised that Buddhists may model themselves after Buddha and Muslims after Mohammed etc.

Researcher Reflexivity

IPA researchers take a symbolic interactionist position and is aware of their role in both data production and data analysis. Two issues are explored in regards to the researcher's influence on the present study. Firstly, the researcher is significantly younger than the participants (early 30s) and therefore has less lived experience than the cohort interviewed. This may limit the researcher's worldview and subtle meaning could be missed in the interpretation process. Secondly, the researcher is not Christian and, since nearly all participants were Christian, may have missed understanding something of the participants' meanings. To minimise the effect of these potential biases, the researcher met regularly with her supervisor, who has expertise in ageing, and maintained a journal to facilitate transparency of the research process.

Conclusion

This study has provided insight into the phenomenological experiences of spirituality for Australian older adults. The key finding of this study was that spirituality unfolded in a relationship with a transcendent force, creating personal meaning and bringing benefit to everyday life. Furthermore, spiritual beliefs guided

behaviour and were a source of resilience at times of crisis which promoted psychological wellbeing. Taken together, this study provided support for the existing literature conducted in the U.S., Canada, and Britain that associate spirituality with wellbeing in older adulthood.

The main limitation of this study was the relatively homogenous sample. With only one Atheist participant a limited perspective is available on those who do not value spirituality; time constraints precluded a larger sample. The predominance of Christian affiliated participants means that spirituality was explored within a religious context. Therefore, the findings are limited to this group of older adults. Since all spiritual participants were religious, it would be interesting to explore the differences between older adults who are spiritual but not religious. Furthermore, without a comparative age group, there is no indication that the present findings would not also apply to younger cohorts. The sample self-selected into the study and so may be at the higher end of the spectrum of those older adults who value spirituality. Building on the present study, future research could include larger samples from a variety of ages and faiths, such as Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism to explore the potential of a universal spirituality which utilises faith to bridge human differences.

This study has provided an initial exploration of the role and meaning of spirituality to Australian older adults. Theoretically, this study suggests that positive reconciliation with others may be equally as important as the reconciliation of broken relationships (Sulmasy, 2001). Furthermore, this study challenges the idea that surrendering personal control and a need for understanding to a transcendent force is not only limited to collectivistic cultures such as African Americans (Harvey

and Silverman, 2007). There seems to be a case for promoting spirituality in older adulthood to enhance well being in everyday life and at times of crisis. For the spiritual participants, spirituality is a way of life and a fundamental principle guiding behaviour, which promotes wellbeing and equanimity of mind.

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Appendix A

Spirituality Study Information Letter

Date

Dear <fill in blank before giving to participant>

Thank you for your interest in this research. My name is Sue Grossman and I conduct this study as an Honours project in psychology at Edith Cowan University. This study has gained the approval of the Ethics Committee of the faculty of Computing, Health and Science at Edith Cowan University. At the conclusion of the study, a summary of the results will be available to you upon request.

This letter is designed to provide you with information in regard to this research, whereupon you can decide whether you would like to participate or not. Should you have any questions, I or my supervisor (Dr. Eyal Gringart), welcome your call at the following numbers. Furthermore, if you would like to talk to an independent person, you may contact Dr. Dianne McKillop who is the coordinator of fourth year studies.

Sue Grossman
Telephone 08 9467 9655
Email spiritualitystudy@twilight.com.au

Dr. Eyal Gringart
Telephone 08 6304 5631
Email e.gringart@ecu.edu.au

Dr. Dianne McKillop
Telephone 08 6304 5736
Email d.mckillop@ecu.edu.au

I will be asking you to share your thoughts and feelings in regards to the role of spirituality in your everyday life. With your permission the interview will be recorded. The interview is expected to take approximately 60 minutes and I will then transcribe it. The data may be available in published form, however, you will not be identifiable. All data collected will be held in strict confidence. This research will hopefully contribute to and improve the training for people who help older adults.

In the unlikely event that you experience discomfort from participating in the research, anonymous telephone counselling can be received at no cost from one of these reputable organisations:

1. Lifeline 13 11 14
2. The Samaritans 08 9381 5555.

Your time is sincerely appreciated.

Thank you and regards

Sue Grossman

Appendix B
Consent Form

The Role of Spirituality in Older Adults’ Lives

I (the participant) have read the information letter provided and any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study, realising that I may withdraw at any time without consequence. I am aware that the research data gathered for this study may be published in a report, provided I am not identifiable. I also agree to the interview being recorded for the purpose of accurate analyses.

Participant’s name	Participant’s signature	Date
Researcher’s name	Researcher’s signature	Date

Appendix C

Interview Schedule

1. When you think of spirituality, what comes to mind?
2. How do you bring your spirituality into your everyday life?
3. What changes in your spirituality have you seen over your life?
4. What specific practices or activities do you carry out as part of your spiritual life?
 - a. In terms of your prayer, how do you pray and what do you pray about?
5. What would be the consequence if you neglected or abandoned the spiritual part of your life?
6. Just in comparison, are there people that you know that don't have spirituality in their life? (Yes.) How would you describe those people?
7. If someone genuinely came to you and wanted to develop their spirituality, what advice would give them?
8. When you've had a difficult choice to make in the past, how did your spirituality help you through that decision making?
9. Where did you come to learn about your different spiritual beliefs?
10. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about your spirituality, but should have?

Appendix D

Contact Summary Form

Pseudonym	
Contact type	
Date	

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this contact?

2. Summarise the information you got (or consider what is missing) on each of the target questions?

Question	Information

3. Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, illuminating, or important in this contact?

4. What new (or remaining) target questions do you have in considering the next contact?

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